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ABSTRACT

Population education can help students develop coping skills and make responsible decisions as members of a family, a community, a nation, and a world. For example, by studying and understanding the impact of changes in population growth rates, compositional characteristics, and migration shifts, students, as future citizens, will be better able to take part in the process of social planning. Population education will help students comprehend the cause and effect relationships which result in vanishing species, severe distress to delicate ecosystems on coastal areas, changing health problems, and manpower needs. Interest in population education is developing across the nation. However, teachers have insufficient knowledge about population and how to infuse it into the existing social studies curriculum. In an effort to ameliorate the lack of knowledge and to develop continued interest in the study of population dynamics, Towson (Maryland) State University has organized the Population Education Institute, which now offers summer workshops for teachers and other interested parties. Teachers are taught that population education encompasses basic population and demographic terms, the relationship of population to standards of living and human health, population impact on environment, population and the economy, and population policies and programs. The paper concludes by outlining the objectives of the workshops and the skills they attempt to develop. (RM)

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WHY TEACH POPULATION EDUCATION?

by

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WHY TEACH POPULATION EDUCATION?

If asked to discuss the implications of population change, it is possible that few other than demographers might address the question intelligently. Yet it is of great significance to the everyday-life of the pipe fitter, the waitress and the librarian. Most of us have not considered the dynamics of the resulting physical and social forces of shifts of people, at least not in depth. However, it offers a focal point toward which can be directed much, if not all, of what we are teaching today.

A focal point--but, it seems to us, a very significant foacl point. Many changes or "gimmicks" in teaching may have been helpful in the past simply because of positive responses to a new approach. We do not offer an examination of population change as a new gimmick but rather as a needed awareness of an age-old phenomenon which has been ignored and unexplored as a means of viewing our world and what we want in the future.

Population change inherently projects a strong element of futurism. The Summer, 1981, issue of National Forum is devoted entirely to such perspectives. In it we find Alvin Toffler's analysis of events surrounding the energy crisis[1] and Erik Eckholm's ruminations on disappearing species.[2] These are all events in the making which are affected by, and will futuristically affect, population and their stabilities. Interest in the future is increasingly exhibited by published articles and even an entire journal on the subject, THE FUTURIST.

It is obvious to most that this future has been shaped by past events, a combination of what people both require and choose and of natural phenomena over which they have little or no control. Today is thus shaped by yesterday, and tomorrow is determined by both yesterday and today. Clearly we can't change yesterday, but we might conceivably do a better job of managing today so as to impact rationally upon tomorrow.

A democracy--and our world--must depend upon an informed constituency and cannot afford an electorate which is ignorant of the effects of population dynamics. The impact of changes in population growth rates, compositional characteristics, and migration shifts must be clearly understood for adequate social planning. As one example, recent floods of immigrants from Cuba, Haiti, and other parts of Latin America have led to the "Latinization of Miami." These immigrants are often fleeing poverty and repression, examples of what demographers call "push factors."[3] This, in turn, has "pushed out" many whites in the Miami area, leading to hostility and resentment toward the newcomers. Miami's mayor has predicted the area will become a battleground.[4] This is certain to occur without a realistic confrontation of the problems and a concerted effort to systematically address the needs of this very heterogeneous population.

Most people have heard of the "baby boom". Some even know to what it refers. However, few understand the impact of the baby boom upon such problems as explosive suburban growth and central city decline, tax revolt, increase in crime, inflation, and unemployment. In a recent review of two books documenting the impact of the baby boom, the reviewer states, "Why didn't someone tell me this before, I found myself muttering . . . ."[5] Indeed, why haven't they?

Fewer still comprehend the cause and effect relationships which result in vanishing species, severe distress to delicate ecosystems on coastal areas, changing health problems and manpower needs. Still deeper are the issue of the impact of vanishing species. Why should we not clear-cut our timber, both young and old trees. Only now we learn that a lichen found on old growth in the West provides the means for perpetuating the forest itself. With its special properties, the Lobaria oregana fixes per acre the amount of nitrogen essential for the trees to grow.[6] A lumber industry dependent on a lichen? Who would have thought?

Population studies includes the study of people as they live in families, villages, cities, and nations. It is a study of basic needs, how they are met, and the ways in which their choices affect the people's physical and social lives. It considers jobs and how they are provided. It concerns income and how it is distributed in with the dynamics of what occurs when some have much more than they need and others can barely sustain life. It is collecting and interpreting data, as well as exmining attitudes, values, customs, and mores. An understanding of the dynamicsof population change must include the impact of shifts in age structure, sex ratios, geographical locations, racial and ethnic proportions, as well as total numbers. It must incorporate the examination of the ripple effect of all phenomena upon the quality of life: physically, mentally, socially, emotionally, and spiritually. It is the means whereby students can be helped to develop coping skills and to make responsible decisions as members of a family, a community, a nation, and a world.

Population studies must <u>not</u> be a means for <u>promoting</u> birth control or zero population growth, although an understanding of these concepts might well be included. It should be kept value free. Each of us has and should be permitted to retain the right to decide what the world should be like.

The individual components for population studies are all available. Most of them, in some form, are being incorporated into curricula now. Additionally, new mandates are increasingly requiring a multidisciplinary approach to education. Population studies demands this approach as well and can offer a central theme for all of the social studies from geography, demography and sociology, to current events. It also permits the inclusion of the basics of reading, writing, and arithmentic; and it does so with a focal point that reaches the heart of significance for today. It should help to determine the quality of tomorrow or its very existence.

There has been more population education activity in the developing world than in the United States. However, in the United States a public school system which has taken the lead to institutionalize population education in their curricula (K-12) is Baltimore City. Support for population education studies follows recommendations by the President's Commission on Population and the American Future in 1972, the Federal Interagency Committee on Education in 1976, and the House Select Committee on Population in 1978.[7] Interest is developing across the nation, but teachers have insufficient knowledge about population studies and how to infuse it into the existing curriculum.

In an effort to ameliorate the lack of knowledge and to develop continued interest in the study of population dynamics, Towson State University has formed an interdisciplinary committee. The committee, having organized the Population Education Institute, has begun to offer summer workshops for teachers and other interested parties.

Population education encompasses:

1. basic population and demographic terms
2. the relationship of population to standards of living and human health
3. population impact on environment
4. population and the economy
5. population policies and programs

An emphasis is placed on an understanding of:

1. a world with much larger population than ever before
2. a world with a rapidly growing population
3. a world which is increasingly divided into areas of slow growth and rapid growth
4. a world with a much more advanced technology than ever before

5. a world with increased interdependence among population groups

6. a world in which the origin of events and problems is increasingly seen as consisting of multiple causes

7. a world in which the multiple causes are increasingly understood to have multiple consequences (the ripple effect)

8. a world in which the need to confront the multiple consequences of any major action is increasingly apparent

The skills that are developed include:

1. using the inquiry method to indentify, analyze and draw conclusions about contemporay world problesm

2. evaluating hypotheses about contemporary world problems

3. interpreting number facts

4. reading factual materials critically

5. writing summaries as well as essays and reports

6. constructing and interpreting charts and graphs

7. analytically viewing and listening to audio visual materials

8. defining social problems and what influences them

9. distinguish facts from feelings and respecting both

10. demographic literacy - the nature, structure, growth and changes of populations, plus basic facts about migration, birth and death

11. relating lifestyle and the trade-offs involved in making personal decisions that affect social phenomena

12. thinking logically

13. synthesizing problems after analyzing them, learning to think holistically as well as reductionistically

We feel that the study of population dynamics has great potential for capturing the interest of students and teachers, thereby contributing significantly to the development of personal values which will formulate the future. An understanding of these phenomena has import for the tax-payer as well as the public official, as both determine the course society will take.

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